

What was Biden doing on January 6?

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The final hearing before the midterm elections of the US House Select Committee investigating January 6 provided further substantiation of two critical facts about the attempted fascistic coup nearly two years ago: First, that it was a planned effort, spearheaded by Trump but with the support of substantial sections of the military, police and state apparatus; and second, that the Democratic Party—and President-Elect Biden in particular—did absolutely nothing to stop the insurrection as it was happening.

Both arise out of the video that was released by the committee, consisting of previously unreleased footage of Democratic Party congressional leaders, including House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, taken by Pelosi's daughter. Cut with scenes of the fascistic mob storming the Capitol to stop certification of the election result and capture or kill elected officials, the reaction of the most powerful leaders of the legislative branch is a portrait of prostration.

The aim of the insurrection was acknowledged by the Democratic Party leaders in Congress as it was happening. As 2:23 p.m., Pelosi is recorded as telling someone on the phone that it was necessary “to finish the proceedings, or else they will have a complete victory,” i.e., that Biden's election would be blocked and the US government overthrown. At 2:42 p.m., she is heard saying that “there has to be some way that we maintain the sense that... government can function and that we can elect a government of the United States.”

Support for the coup within significant sections of the state apparatus was underscored by details released on Thursday, including communications from the Secret Service on the plans of far-right groups to come to the Capitol, arms in hand.

One email dated December 26, 2020, nearly two weeks before the insurrection, stated that members of the Proud Boys planned to “kill people” on January 6. “They think they will have a large enough group to march into DC armed and will outnumber the police so they can't be stopped,” it stated.

Yet nothing was done to protect the Capitol. The meager police forces that were deployed were quickly overrun by

the crowd of insurrectionists following Trump's speech at the Ellipse.

Huddled in their bunkers, the congressional leaders had no plan of action in response. Pelosi and Schumer made a series of calls to various participants in the conspiracy, pleading with them to put an end to it. At 3:00 p.m., Schumer announced that he was “going to call up the effing secretary of DOD,” that is, Trump's acting secretary of defense, Christopher Miller, one of the chief architects of the coup. Schumer and Pelosi proceeded to plead with Miller to call out the Maryland National Guard, which he was blocking. Pelosi informed Miller, whom she called “Mr. Secretary,” that she was going to call the mayor of Washington, D.C. to see if there is anything she could do.

Around 3:20 p.m., Pelosi called the governor of Virginia to see if he could send National Guard troops, but added in a bewildered tone that she was uncertain whether he might need the approval of the federal government.

Schumer and Pelosi then called Trump's acting attorney general, Jeff Rosen, at 3:25 p.m. Pelosi pleaded with Rosen to ask Trump “if he could at least” do something, while Schumer suggested that he “get the president to tell them to leave the Capitol.”

At one point, around 4:30 p.m., Pelosi said she was told (it is unclear by whom) that Congress would not be able to go back into session in the Capitol building for several days because, she said, of the “poo poo that they're making, literally and figuratively.” She was prepared to accept the effective prorogation of Congress.

All this places in stark relief the complete silence of Biden as events were unfolding. The congressional leaders at several points called officials in the Trump administration and the military, and Schumer referred to a discussion with the “vice president elect,” that is, Kamala Harris.

No one, however, mentioned any discussions with the individual whose election was in the process of being overturned. What was Biden doing to defend his own election?

Indeed, in all the books and articles detailing the events of that day, there is almost nothing available on the actions of Biden during the most critical hours. One article in *Politico*,

published this past January, notes that “little is known about how Biden and his team processed, in real time, the riot that was taking place.”

After reporting that Biden was receiving calls from advisors from his home in Wilmington, Delaware, the article notes that he left his house at about 2:20 p.m. for The Queen music hall. “By that time things had escalated significantly, and he went right into the hold to keep watching. Then, he went dark.”

Biden did not make a public statement until nearly two hours later, just after 4:00 p.m. This period, between 2:00 and 4:00, was crucial for the insurrection. It included the bulk of the 199 minutes during which the military stood by and did nothing—between 1:49 p.m., when D.C. National Guard Commander William Walker submitted a request to acting Defense Secretary Miller and the top military command for the deployment of the National Guard, and their final authorization at 5:08 pm.

Whatever Biden was doing during this period, he was leaving his options open, including reaching some sort of power-sharing agreement or conceding the election entirely. There may well have been calls made to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mark Milley, to determine which side the military would support.

Biden finally emerged from the “dark” at just after 4:00 pm. He delivered remarks, all of eight minutes long, appealing to Trump personally to intervene. “I call on President Trump to go on national television now, to fulfill his oath and defend the Constitution, and demand an end to this siege,” he declared. He concluded his remarks with an appeal for bipartisan unity and a further call to the arch conspirator behind the coup: “President Trump, step up.”

As the WWSWS wrote on January 7, “This bankrupt appeal to the would-be fascist dictator will go down in history as Biden’s ‘Hitler, do the right thing’ speech.”

The coup ultimately failed, but it was not due to the actions of the Democratic Party. If events had played out somewhat differently, there is no doubt that the Democrats would have accepted an outcome in which, as Pelosi said, “they will have a complete victory.”

The prostration of the Democratic Party prior to and during the events of January 6 is not the product of mere cowardice or stupidity. There were political considerations involved.

First, as representatives of the corporate and financial elite, the Democrats were and remain terrified of any action that could provoke a mass response within the working class that would spiral out of control. The Democrats’ central aim was and is not the preservation of democratic forms of rule, but the stability of the state apparatus and its two-party system.

Biden expressed this less than 48 hours after the coup,

when he said at a press conference, “We need a Republican Party... that is principled and strong.” Biden’s inaugural address two weeks after the coup was devoted entirely to calls for “unity” with his “Republican colleagues,” with barely a mention of the January 6 insurrection.

Twenty-one months after the insurrection, not a single leading figure in the conspiracy, Trump included, has been arrested, let alone prosecuted.

Second, and bound up with this, the Democrats’ primary criticism of Trump was and remains focused on questions of foreign policy, and particularly the plans, now activated, for war with Russia. To the extent that the faction of the ruling class opposed to Trump is escalating the conflict, as expressed in the decision of the committee to subpoena Trump on Thursday, it is motivated largely by the imperatives of American imperialism.

Even here, the Democrats have ceded the initiative to the Republicans, including figures like Liz Cheney, the dominant figure in on the January 6 Select Committee. The aim of the Democrats is to deepen their alliance with at least a faction of the Republican Party on the basis of a common program of war abroad and social reaction at home.

The entire response of the Democratic Party, combined with the reactionary policies of the Biden administration, has served to politically strengthen the openly fascist wing of the ruling class, which stands to make significant gains in the midterm elections.

If basic democratic rights are to be defended and the tendency toward dictatorship and fascism opposed, it is not through the mechanism of the Democratic Party or any faction of the ruling class political establishment, but through the methods of class struggle and socialist revolution.



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